



A Safe, Affordable Home:  
The Foundation of Opportunity

**Testimony to The Housing Committee on Feb. 5, 2015  
by David Fink, Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities  
In opposition to HB5055, 5306, 5577, 5579, 5581, etc.**

Chairman Butler, Chairman Holder-Winfield, Sen. Hwang, Rep. Kupchick, Honorable Committee Members,

My name is David Fink, and I am the policy director for the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide housing policy and advocacy organization that supports state-of-the-art solutions to end homelessness, create supportive and affordable housing and build strong communities across the state.

I am here to oppose, in the strongest terms, HB5055, 5306, 5577, 5579, 5581 and the many other bills related to the 8-30g statute that would repeal or seriously weaken it. The statute has helped create thousands of affordable and modest market-rate homes for workers and families across our state. Virtually all of the proposals before you today would render it totally ineffective. They would also strangle the successful and growing HOMEConnecticut program, which some of you know as the Housing Program for Economic Growth, that this committee was instrumental in creating.

You have heard/will hear opponents of the 8-30g statute complain today that it doesn't work, that it is burdensome, that it is a bad statute.

Their complaints couldn't be more wrong. 8-30g is effective in vital ways:

First, as mentioned, it has helped create thousands of homes for families and children in municipalities with good schools, abundant services and many job opportunities. For every person who cares about economic growth, closing the achievement gap and individual opportunity and responsibility, being able to live in communities that work best for your children and families is vital.

Second, municipalities aware of 8-30g's 10% threshold have worked to create affordable homes that they never would have tried to create if 8-30g didn't exist. Former Darien First Selectman David Campbell was quite frank when he told the Housing Committee several years ago that his town created more affordable homes – enough to secure a moratorium -- because it wanted to avoid the provisions of 8-30g.

Third, in similar fashion, 8-30g has spurred many municipalities to embrace the HOMEConnecticut program as a way of proactively creating the types of affordable and mixed-

income homes they need. Dozens of towns are actively engaged in HOMEConnecticut now. Without 8-30g, many would not have embraced -- and will not embrace -- HOMEConnecticut.

Most important, 8-30g opponents are misinformed when they contend that 8-30g demands significantly more mixed-income housing than they can possibly provide. The truth is that communities that HAVE tried have not only qualified for a moratorium allowed for under the statute but used that 4-year period to continue their efforts and attain an extension of the moratorium.

Significantly, the Town of Westport has been working over the last several years to achieve a moratorium and is now very close! Westport's efforts are only the latest evidence that the 8-30g statute works. Recently, Ridgefield joined Darien, Trumbull and Berlin among towns that have qualified for a moratorium. A recently approved development will now allow New Canaan to qualify. Darien has recently applied for a second moratorium and a new proposed development in Milford would allow that town to qualify. North Haven is close to qualifying, as is Farmington. And other towns are getting close, too.

You also have heard/will hear towns say they can't produce more affordable units because they say they are "built out." You should know there is no such thing as "built out" or we'd never see a crane in densely settled municipalities. Cities and towns repurpose properties all the time.

You also have heard/will hear officials say their municipalities don't have the sewers or other infrastructure to support the density that allows affordability. Well, there are amazing new technologies that can support density when sewers are unavailable and which municipalities can explore. And if those technologies can't support density in their towns, I'd argue they don't have much to fear from 8-30g!

In the final analysis, towns that want to create a wider array of housing options on their own terms -- using HOMEConnecticut or any of a number of other tools -- can avoid pressure from 8-30g. Towns that don't try will be subject to its provisions.

But this committee should make no mistake: Connecticut is in dire need of more homes that are affordable to working class households, families, young professionals and Baby Boomers.

We have the 6<sup>th</sup> highest median monthly housing costs in the nation, the 8<sup>th</sup> highest median home values and the 8<sup>th</sup> highest housing wage. 49% of all renters and 34% of owners spend more than 30% of their income on housing. That's bad for them and bad for the state's economy. Supply is the problem. We are 50<sup>th</sup> in units built per capita over the last decade (2004-'13). And what we've built is not what we need.

The bills I have cited would make 8-30g ineffective, badly weaken HOMEConnecticut and mortally wound the effort to create affordable homes that our parents, our workers, our adult children and so many others so seriously need. In a state that has lost too many young adults in part because of extraordinarily high housing costs, in a state where 38% of all households spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing, in a dangerously aging state that must keep and attract young families to in turn attract new employers, this committee should not jeopardize the creation of housing we sorely need.

The stakes are too high. This bill would do more damage than you can imagine.